

whole areas have been left out of our economic growth; or you have to find more customers for America's goods and services around the world.

Therefore, I have continued to push the idea of the expansion of trade on fair and just terms. I have promoted the empowerment zones that the Vice President has so ably led our efforts in for the last 6½ years, and this new markets initiative, to reach into the rural areas, the urban communities, the Native American reservations where there has been almost no economic growth. We have cut the welfare rolls almost in half, trying to move able-bodied people from welfare to work.

The last big chunk of people in this country who could keep the economy going for all of us, with low inflation, are the Americans with disabilities, who want to work, who can work, and who are not in the work force. Every American citizen should have a selfish interest in the pursuit of this goal in the most aggressive possible way.

As everybody here knows—and Secretary Herman already mentioned it—one of the very largest obstacles to employment for Americans with disabilities is the fear that they'll lose their health insurance once they take a job—that which is provided by the Federal Government. Not so very long ago, I went in February to New Hampshire and had a roundtable about this, where people were explicitly discussing this in graphic terms, giving through the press to the American people dollars-and-cents reports on what the consequences of this would be.

Under current law, many people with disabilities simply can't work and keep Medicare or Medicaid. For many Americans, medical bills literally cost thousands of dollars beyond what is typically covered by an employer's private insurance. For many Americans, their medical bills would be greater than their entire salary.

Therefore, we keep a lot of people out of the work force. But we don't save the Federal Government any money, because they're spending the money anyway, on the health care. So we deny opportunities to millions; we prevent the American economy from reaching its full potential; we don't save the

Federal Treasury one red cent, because the health care money is being spent anyway.

Today, as a country, it is time to say that no American should have to choose between going to work and paying the medical bills. Last summer, and in the State of the Union, I asked Congress to free our fellow Americans from this unfair burden. The "Work Incentive Improvement Act," sponsored by Senators Jeffords and Kennedy, Senators Roth and Moynihan, and a wide group of sponsors in both Houses, from both parties, will do just that. There are, at last count, over 70 Members of the Senate who have signed on to the bill.

There has been a lot of commentary lately about how hard it is to get legislation through the Congress, with the partisan divide. Well, there are a lot of issues on which Republicans and Democrats have honest disagreements. Thank goodness this is not one of them. Because it is not one of them, because we already have over 70 people who say they will vote for this if they can just get a chance to vote for it on the floor of the Senate, I am confident that we can work together to pass the work incentives bill by July the 26th of this year, the 9th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We can celebrate that great, historic, bipartisan landmark by opening the doors of opportunity for millions of people even wider, enabling more Americans with disabilities to join the proud ranks of working citizens.

There is more, I would argue, that we should do. In my balanced budget presented to the Congress, I proposed a \$1,000 tax credit to help people with disabilities afford special transportation technology, which you've already heard about, or personal assistance needed to make the transition to work. And we must double our efforts to make assistive technology, such as voice recognition software, mobile telephones, braille translators, more widely available. So I ask Congress to move forward with both of these proposals in my budget.

And today I am taking immediate action to give more Americans with disabilities the opportunity to become part of the largest work force in America. On Monday the First Lady, the Vice President, and Mrs. Gore and

I will be hosting a White House Conference on Mental Health, an area that has been a special concern, as I'm sure many of you know, to Mrs. Gore for many years. One of our goals is to help more Americans understand that mental illness is not a character flaw. It is a disability.

That is why today I am using my executive authority as President to strip away outdated barriers that keep people with psychiatric disabilities from serving America in our Federal Government, directing all Federal agencies to provide applicants with mental illnesses the same opportunities as other applicants with disabilities to work for the United States of America.

As you know, and as we see here today, not only the Government, but individual citizens can take action and make an enormous difference. The three citizens we honor today are proof of the difference one person can make, and I am proud to present these awards to each of them.

First, to Joyce Bender. Fifteen years ago, as Joyce lay in a hospital trauma unit, recovering from a near-fatal cerebral hemorrhage, she made a vow to give something back to the patients who were not so lucky. Through Bender Consulting Services, she's used her own expertise as a professional headhunter to place people with disabilities in high-wage, high-tech jobs.

She knows the demand for high-skill workers will only continue to grow, and she is determined to make sure people with disabilities will be ready to meet it. She's founded a new program to train even more people with disabilities in the high-tech skills that are the ticket to the world of the 21st century.

It's an honor to present this award to Joyce Bender. Joyce.

[The President presented the award and congratulated Ms. Bender.]

The President. Next, to James Click, Jr. Over more than 30 years as a car dealer in California and Arizona, Jim Click has become an undisputed leader in his field. But he's also unrivaled in his commitment to extending opportunity to people with disabilities.

A few years ago, he discovered he could encourage more businesses to follow his lead

by making it easier for them to find workers with the right skills. So he founded LINKAGES, which brings Tucson businesses and rehabilitation programs together to match qualified workers with disabilities to jobs in the private sector.

In a little over a year, more than 170 people have found work through LINKAGES. It's an honor to present this award to Jim Click and hope others will follow his lead in every community in the country.

[The President presented the award and congratulated Mr. Click.]

The President. Finally, to Laura Hershey. Laura has said, and I quote, "Disability is not a tragedy. It is powerful."

By speaking her mind, and using her gifts as a writer to point out the shortcomings and the possibilities of our society, Laura has found the power to make the world a better place for people with disabilities. As head of a variety of disability organizations, and as a private citizen, she has fought to reform our Social Security, housing and transportation systems to better serve Americans living with disabilities.

Economic freedom and self-sufficiency for Americans with disabilities is her goal. I am confident she will not rest until she achieves it. And I am proud to present this third and final award to Laura Hershey.

[The President presented the award and congratulated Ms. Hershey.]

The President. So there you have them: a high-tech headhunter from Pittsburgh, a car dealer from Tucson, an activist from Denver. Now, if you didn't see them you might think, just by those descriptions, that these people have little in common. But they are bound together by their remarkable passion for empowering Americans with disabilities and helping all Americans to live closer to the ideal of equal opportunity for all. Each is, therefore, a true patriot.

President Truman once said, "We love our country because it offers us the chance to lead useful lives and to do what we can for those around us."

I thank each of you for reminding us that, really, those two things are two sides of the same coin. We cannot truly lead useful lives